

I left the Mormon church this last September. For those who don't know much about what that is- it means i left a society, and with it- my life as i knew it. It is an all encompassing religion and you are either a part of it and all your neighbors and friends.. or you are out. You are either a member or a nonmember. You are labeled the black sheep. The one who did not "stay in the boat".

I had to leave my mission in Brazil to do so, and despite my leaders trying to force me to stay, telling me my family is heading for hell and that i am a disappointment to my family legacy, and having to stand up for facts as everyone tried to make me feel like i was crazy... i left (after HOURS of being stuck in a room and hammered down by those i had looked up to).

I left in honor of those being suppressed by my religion and for the people that i had been unknowingly lying to as i taught them about church "history" so i could get more members. Turned out our history was a made up story that changed several times, written by a cheating man who then decided to make having more than one wife okay after getting caught (in short). I was teaching his last revised story as fact to those believers who would leave their whole family for it. I was teaching kids to look up to this man, and follow his every word. I could not stand by it. I could not teach something so untrue as though it's truth and watch these people give up their great lives for it. Finding out our doctrines about women, african americans, gays, and all those who dare to exist differently... i had to leave. This was a decision made in a day- and it was the hardest one i have ever made. I knew it meant leaving my friends, my goals, my college acceptance into a good university and my whole system of belief and my credibility among everyone i was close to. I turned my whole world upside down over the truth and the need to be a good person. Lying and discrimination is not being a good person.

I am not against religion. it's okay to believe what you wish- as long as facts can change them and you not excuse them. As long as you are not teaching people to close their minds to any other possibilities. I found that mormons are taught "just not to look" at historic accounts.... to blind those beautiful eyes we were given. They can see a fact and choose to not bend their beliefs around them, but to bend the facts around their beliefs- beliefs that teach discrimination and uniformity. So i flew home (an adventure as scary as anything but that's for another time) and started researching (something missionaries are conveniently not allowed to do.. unless it is approved. We were not even allowed to read doctrine books written by certain prophets... since they were deemed more extreme) Long story short- something masked to be loving and whitewashed with pretty families was built upon not a firm foundation... but stories spun multiple times, homophobic and sexist views, and far too many cover ups. All the while my friends sent me emails and texts and calls all telling me i was lost and to get back in the boat- on the path, Sending me conference talks from the church about lost sheep and "truth not being all that important" (quoted almost directly) and how i need to come to jesus. They told me this was the wrong decision and it is never too late to turn back. The nicer ones said things like they are praying for me to figure out what is best for me and they feel bad for me. They all now looked at my lifestyle as wrong- no matter what it consisted of. If it wasn't the way they had been fed since

birth, it was wrong. My happy life- full of goodness- is somehow not okay because i am not conforming.

I knew how they all felt because i had been one of them. Each time I confronted the persistent ones they would all deny their feelings and backtrack- as if i had a lobotomy and somehow forgot every single sunday lesson i had been taught too, every day on my mission, and every conversation they as individuals had with me. It was insulting and infuriating. It is like being in a club and being in meetings about how the rest of the world sucks... then leaving the club, the club members harassing you, and when you calling them out, them saying they don't think everyone else sucks. They just think they are different and how dare i exclude them in my life. So i dropped every one that made me feel less than i am. Negativity is not okay- and the church is negative- saying everyone else is wrong ("we are the only true church"). I have kept like two who have respected me enough to not say anything offensive or dishonest. I know they learn every week that i will be taught in heaven that my lifestyle is not legitimate, and i know that they think they are all in the boat and i am not.... because i sat next to them during every single talk. But here is the thing about getting out of the boat- the ocean is a beautiful place. It is so deep and colorful and open and REAL. Not made by one dude who wanted everyone to listen to him. There are things you have never seen and marvels that only those brave enough to dive deeper can see. It is a shame to stay on the surface in the boat, and sad to know that somehow "staying in the boat" is considered righteous. Life is meant to be lived deeper than that- open. It is not supposed to be confined to a little box of thinking they call the boat. It is scary and wondrous and stunning and majestic and full of discovery. It is getting out of the boat and seeing the ocean floor. It is not sitting in the boat and having the captain describe it to you as you follow everything he tells you to do. It is not judging those out of the boat, and it is not living in fear of finding out too much about the sea.

So here i am- in the waves- as every friend and family member sits in the boat and talks about how i am not eternal and my family is not and the rest of my life is one wrong turn.

I understand- it is threatening because if i am happy and if my life is okay... then they are not right. They are not the only way. And that tears down everything they have ever learned. It is unfair of me to assume that someone who has never gotten out of the boat, and is told every day to "stay in the boat", can appreciate the sea.

So As i sit here on my ocean faced deck, wrapped in a thick, felt, pine tree blanket, and listening to my walter mitty soundtrack, the melon sun melts below the islands and drips all down my washed face. There is a life after the church and it is joyful. It is better because it is honest and you don't have to excuse your leaders to justify your identity. There is something so beautiful and kind over the horizon. The sunshine sets into the fabric around me and warms my body which earlier today was swimming in the icy blue sea. I watch as periwinkle waves softly lap against the amber shore rocks below and the boats churn up rose froth as they skip across surfaces. The fresh wind envelopes my sunkissed face- peeking out above my blanket, and reminds me who i am. Even the mirror patches in the tides keep moving on. The moon rises

above my windowed house and greenery webs with last light around me. I am surrounded by good things and souls and light all reminding me. How can someone see me- so peaceful and so appreciative of the beauty I sit in tonight, and think I don't understand creation? That I don't know where i came from, as i marvel at that crater moon and the twinkling houses that are my world. How can someone say i am going somewhere less glorious than them after these string of ocean days we call life? How can someone say i have left the path- that the girl who loves the bird song in the evening more than anything, and who is just living her bravest life- just lost her way? Sitting here reminds me that while Mormons see a girl sitting wrapped in a home blanket and letting the sunset rest on her face, and looking with all the love in the world at the ocean, and they see someone who is disobedient. Maybe they will see something beautiful and kind and strong- but they will first and foremost see a non member. A black sheep. Someone who left the fold. These are not my feelings (believe me most of the time i feel they see something harsher), but my experience and religious protocol as an LDS member. Members are TAUGHT to think that. It is a missionary church. Anyone who doesn't feel it- is not living their religion. If your history and facts offend you; if i can print out a historic account of your prophet and it can make you angry (done that lol)... then you are not angry with me, but with your religion. Friends- if you are angry with your religion or lifestyle... leave it. It is hard and lonely sometimes... but it is kind and loving and the right thing to do.

You can't love gays and still say that they need to go through therapy to be "cured". You can't watch Ellen and pretend to be okay with her choices. You can't like african americans and support a church thats doctrine is they will be slaves in heaven. You can't see inter-racial couples and think they are cute when you have prophets (men of god who apparently is always of the same opinion) who teach that whites who "breed" with other races will be "struck dead on the spot". You can't support women if you teach them that they MUST have kids and shame them when they have careers or maybe don't get married or even just choose to have two kids. You can't be kind and loving if you believe you are the only right religion. The rest of us aren't wrong. you are not the only right ones. You are not the center of the universe, and it is okay to think for yourself (thinking for yourself is not "following the prophet" and doing whatever he says). Leaving the church taught me many things- but mainly that discrimination has many faces- putting a smiling family with a temple on the label does not make it different. I speak on all forms of group thinking and cults and selectivity. None of it is okay. Making it your lifestyle isn't either. So i made a hard decision and left. That took a lot and it took a lot from me. But i can sit on my beach and know that i am living honesty and supporting things that help others.

As i write this on this little deck seaside, i am filled with inner peace- the kind that comes from that reassuring color the sky turns when you just sit and watch; when you pay attention. I have become very in tune with myself, and my worth. It is not based on how obedient i am, or how many negative influences i put up with. It is based on how well you love. Or maybe something else- i have grown to learn that no one knows, and to think you do is so egocentric. But if it is based on love, i think i will be okay. I am at home in my sunset watching, ocean swimming soul.

And that's good. It's not a sin. My lovely life here on the beach is not a sin either. I am good. Life is good. My soul is good. And none of that is because i follow a prophet or wear more clothes or don't have sex. It is because i follow my own moral compass and serve because it is my character to do so- not because i need to, but because i am my own person. I am responsible for my beliefs and i stand up. So in this moment of sitting down and just being... i know my soul is okay because the big blue world loves me and every one of you. And it has nothing to do with religion, and everything to do with your heart. You are what you believe- and if you believe in discriminatory things- that is who you are. Salvation is not exclusive my friends. We are all part of the same universe and saying some of us are living in a wrong version of it... is wrong. You are wrong. Group thinking is wrong and so is being in it and thinking that you think independently. If you must do what someone else says and think what they do (like mormons must with the prophet), that is not independence. You are not thinking for yourself, and that is a shame, because our minds are so very beautiful. Because that ocean is so very beautiful and if you stay in the boat, you will never see that. You will just be fed that the boat is prettier and that you can't swim. Swimming is not a sin. It may be hard and take time to adapt to leaving the rest of everything- but you will become a better person and be able to know that you are standing up for that ocean and everyone in it, and that we were meant to swim.